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advancement, will go to the head of their oluina to ask for his intercession with the spirits.(1)

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As legal head of the village, the *sekulu yimbo* presides over both the more serious cases, which are held before the whole village on the dance-floor, and the simpler ones, which require the attendance only of those concerned, together with their respective elders, and may be taken up either in the *onjango* or in the headman's own courtyard. Hambly seems to suggest that all the section-heads act with the village headman as a kind of council, but does not give details. He states also that the *olosekulu* (sing. *sekulu*) of the village formerly had charge of trials for murder, theft, adultery, and arguments over land,(2) and points out that they were more active in the legal system than the chiefs.(3) This is even more true today, when the village court of justice continues to function in spite of political and administrative changes, although the offices of chiefs and to some extent of sub-chiefs have largely decayed.

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Other functions of the village headman include: the distribution of land to the various families when new village sites are opened;(4) the direction of the communal fire-hunts;(5) and, today, the collecting of taxes from the villagers and the direction and organisation of labour to work on the roads.(6) But however numerous the headman's official duties, he usually finds some time to attend to his own affairs, whether he is a farmer, hunter, or trader.(7)

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Succession to headmanship is usually from father to son or from elder to younger brother, "with only as much recognition of primogeniture as belongs to the general ... hierarchy of age."(8) Succession is, however, affected by the "democratic" tendencies in succession to chieftainship.(9)

*The Chief (*osoma or sova*)*(10)

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The Ovimbundu are grouped in 22 chiefdoms, of which half were in the past generally tributary to the more powerful chiefs.(11) At the same time each chiefdom had its separate government and could be considered as a unit in itself. Effective European occupation and direct rule have atrophied the chiefly office among the Ovimbundu, until today chiefs survive as little more than "living museum pieces".(12) Childs(13) enumerates the functions of the chiefly office as follows:

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(a) *Religious.* The chief's ancestral spirits were the principal chiefdom deities, and the king was high-priest as well as the visible "vice-regent and incarnation" of the spirits.

(1) Childs, personal communication.
(2) The maternal uncle is responsible for settling disputes over property which occur within the *oluina*. (Hambly op.cit., p.200).
(3) Ibid. (4) Ibid.
(5) Cushman, op.cit., p.115. (6) Ibid., p.121.
(7) Childs, op.cit., p.36. (8) Ibid., p.44.
(9) Ibid.
(10) *Osoma* means chief or king. *Sova* is the personalized form used with the name. This the Portuguese writers have corrupted into sova or soba. (Childs, personal communication)
(11) See above, p.2.
(12) Childs, op.cit., p.20. (13) Ibid.